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Celebration of the Quadricentennial of the Reformation To be Held October 28, 1917

MARTIN LUTHER.

Martin Luther, the greatest of the reformers of the sixteenth century, was born at Eisleben in Germany on November 10, 1483. His father was a miner in humble circumstances. His mother was a most excellent woman. Shortly after Martin's birth his parents moved to Mansfeld, where by industry and frugality their circumstances improved somewhat.

The son's training, both at home and at school, was of the severe type that was not uncommon in those days, in which very harsh punishment was often inflicted for very simple offenses. Notwithstanding his severity in punishment, his father cared for him most tenderly. In his younger days he frequently carried the little fellow to and from school in his arms.

As he grew older he was sent to school at Magdeburg and Eisenach. His father could provide him only a very limited supply of money, so he added to his resources by singing about the streets, a habit not uncommon among the students of his day.

This was the means of his attracting the notice of a good lady in Eisenach named Cotta, who gave him a comfortable home during his stay there.

When eighteen years of age he entered the University of Erfut and in three years he had taken the degree of doctor of philosophy. He had intended to make the law his profession, but about the time he graduated from the university he found in the library a copy of the Latin translation of the Bible. The study of this book, practically unknown to him before, resulted in a change of mind and purpose.

He withdrew to the Augustine Convent, and there for three years he devoted himself to the study of the Bible and the writings of Augustine. It was during this time that he laid the foundation of the doctrinal convictions that made him such a great man.

When twenty-four years old he was ordained a priest, and at twenty-six he became a bachelor of theology and began lecturing on the Scriptures. He also began preaching, and his sermons reached a wider audience than his lectures. In both he attracted much attention and made a great impression, because his views were novel to the people of his day. Melanethon said that his words were "born not on his lips, but in his soul," and they moved the souls of those who heard them.

In 1510 or 1511 he was sent on a mission to Rome. He was at that time, as he describes himself, "a most insane papist." It had been the height of his ambition to see the Holy City. He was destined to a great disappointment. The abuses of the papacy and the profligacy of the priests thoroughly disgusted him. He began to realize that there was little true religion in the Roman Catholic Church.

About this time, the sale of indulgences was begun on a large scale to secure money to

had to retire from that part of the country. At first the pope did not pay much attention to him, and said that "Friar Martin was a man of genius, and that he did not wish to have him molested." But some of the cardinals began to realize the true character of the movement led by Luther, which gradually assumed a seriousness which was evident to the pope himself. So Luther was summoned to Rome.

His university realized the danger to him, if he obeyed the call, and so prevented his going to Rome. Efforts were made by Rome to silence him, but they were in vain. Luther believed the doctrines that he had announced and felt that it was his duty to preach them.

A papal bull was pronounced against him, but instead of frightening him, he burned the paper in the presence of a multitude of doctors, students and citizens of Wittenberg. Luther was everywhere the hero of the hour.

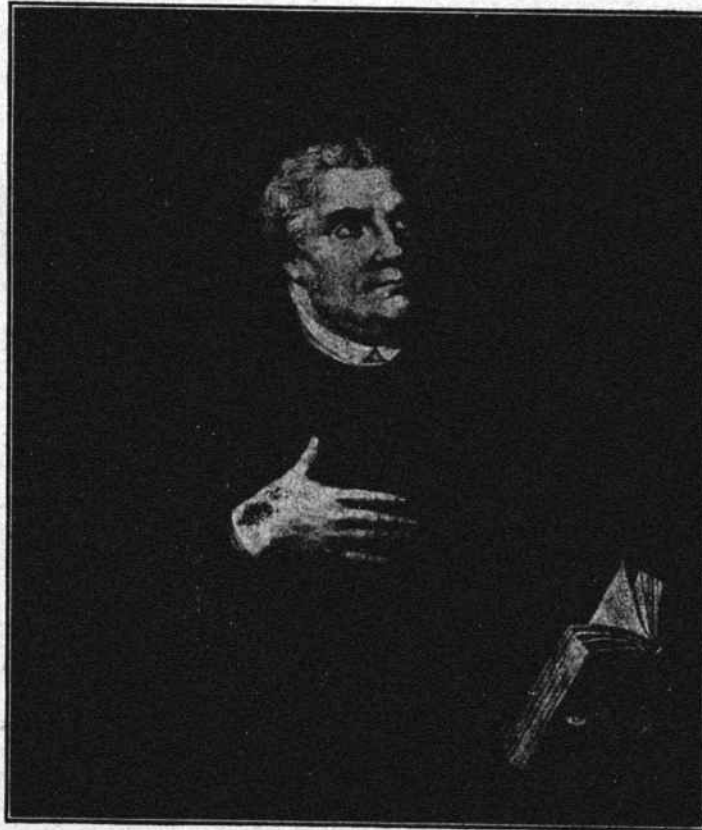
At this time Charles the Fifth succeeded to the throne of the empire, and convened his first diet, or assembly, of the sovereigns and states at Worms in 1521. An order was issued for the destruction of Luther's books and he was summoned to appear before the diet. He was very much pleased with the opportunity of testifying to the truth before the representatives of the whole empire.

His friends tried to prevent his going, but he said to them, "I am determined to enter Worms, although as many devils should set at me as their are tiles on the housetops."

The diet tried to make him retract his teachings. He replied, "Unless I be convinced by Scripture and reason, I neither can nor dare retract anything, for my conscience is a captive to God's word, and it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no otherwise. So help me, God. Amen."

The remainder of his life was almost filled with conflicts with the enemies of the truth. He was never vanquished, though at times he seemed to have all "the powers that be" against him.

He was a man of powerful intellect and of gigantic energy. He was a leader of men, and therefore a reformer in the true sense of the term. The task which he undertook was of titanic magnitude, but he was a Titan in intellectual robustness and moral strength and courage. The work which he did was almost beyond conception.



Martin Luther.

provide for the extravagances of the papal court at Rome. This aroused Luther's indignation very greatly, and he opposed the practice most vehemently. To combat the doctrine of indulgences he drew up ninety-five articles, known as the "ninety-five theses," the main purport of which was to show that the pope had no power to forgive sins, and therefore the indulgences which he sold were of no value. These he nailed to the church door in Wittenberg in challenge to anyone to controvert them.

This bold act on his part awakened great excitement. The news of it spread far and wide so rapidly that it was said, it seemed "as if angels had carried it to the ears of all men."

The result was that John Tetzel, the chief agent of the pope for the sale of indulgences,